Segmenting the Library Market: Reaching Out to the User Community by Reaching Across the Organization

by
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ABSTRACT

In 1996, in order to improve internal communication and decision making, the General Libraries at Emory University began a comprehensive organizational review and redesign process. During a resulting 2001 restructuring, the library introduced a formal mechanism for lateral coordination by segmenting its user community, creating market councils for humanities, social science, science, international and area studies, business, and undergraduates.

The market councils help ensure that the functional teams and processes of the library are meeting the needs of a particular subset of the user community, by paying attention to the relationship between the library and the user, and publicizing and promoting the library's services and resources. Drawing membership from across the library, each market council has considerable leeway in defining and managing itself, and in identifying and engaging issues on behalf of its segment of the user community.

A brief review of the theory and history of the market councils is followed by a summary of current council initiatives and activities. The paper concludes with a discussion of issues facing the councils, including defining the scope of activities within and across councils, expanding their role in formal program assessment and process improvement activities, including training for organizational effectiveness, and membership renewal and succession planning.

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, motivated by a desire to improve communication and decision making, the General Libraries at Emory University began a comprehensive organizational review and redesign process. Five years of organization-wide work on strategy, culture, process improvement, and the structure of reporting lines and relationships, resulted in a substantial team-based restructuring of the organization, including a realignment of functional units around processes. Staff was organized into teams, and the teams into divisions. The new structure attempted to establish divisional boundaries where natural hand-offs occur between work processes, with each division responsible for a major library process such as acquiring and managing information resources, or providing access regardless of resource location. Staff providing organization-wide services to support the work of the divisions and teams was organized into offices, such as budget and finance, human resources, facilities planning and administration, and fundraising.

The redesign process included a conscious, intentional effort to make lateral coordination of workflow and communication across the organization a formal feature of the new organization. The redrawn organization chart introduced a formal mechanism for

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lateral coordination with the creation of *market councils*, intended to address the balance between the library's vertical dimension (reporting lines, performance review processes, and resource allocation) and horizontal dimension (cross-functional teams, working groups, and task forces).

MARKET COUNCILS: STRUCTURE

Since the vertical structure was aligned around functional processes, a different organizing principle was required for the horizontal dimension of the organization; the library chose a *market* orientation.[1] After considering and rejecting a demographic-based segmentation of its market (faculty, graduate student, undergraduate, staff, other), the library chose a modified discipline segmentation of the user community. Market councils were established for:

- Humanities
- Social Sciences
- Science
- International and Area Studies
- Business
- Undergraduates

The market councils were initially linked to the formal vertical organization through the Office of Program Assessment and Coordination (OPAC). With the departure of both the director and the staff in the Office, responsibilities have been re-assigned, primarily to two existing staff members designated as interim co-coordinators of the OPAC. One of the co-coordinators convenes the Market Council Coordinating Group (MCCG), a monthly meeting of the conveners of each market council, and manages listservs for the MCCG and the individual councils. The co-coordinators regularly attend meetings of the Humanities Council and the International Area Studies Council, and visit other councils as needed, at the invitation of the individual conveners.

MARKET COUNCILS: PURPOSE AND FUNCTION

The general purpose of each market council is to help ensure that the functional units and processes of the library are aligned with the needs of a particular subset of the user community, by paying attention to the relationship between the library and the user, helping coordinate library functions and processes across the organization, and promoting the services and resources of the library. Within the overall aims of the market council structure, each council has considerable leeway in defining and managing its membership and internal processes, and in identifying and engaging issues on behalf of its user community.

For example, like its predecessor group the Science Team, the Science Council has focused its efforts on collection development issues, especially big ticket databases and electronic journals. The Humanities Council conducted an assessment of online resources for the humanities by comparing databases available at Emory with those available at selected peer institutions; the library has since purchased many of the databases offered by peers but not previously by Emory. The Humanities Council also analyzed ILL requests as a source of collection management information.

The councils have also tried to build relationships with their constituencies. The Humanities Council will again host this fall a "second annual" reception in the library to welcome Fellows in Emory's *Center for Humanistic Inquiry*. In an effort to communicate more effectively with the user community, the Social Science Council "adopted" a newsletter put out for many years by an individual selector in the social sciences, and has produced it for an entire academic year. Inspired by the success of the Social Science Council, the Science Council issued the first edition of its own newsletter in the spring of

2004; the Humanities Council is planning its first issue for distribution this fall.

Focusing on library service to students, the Undergraduate Market Council aims "to integrate the library's services, collections, and staff into the texture of the campus to enrich the undergraduate educational experience." After determining through benchmarking that the library's collection development policies and practices were meeting the needs of students, the Undergraduate Market Council concentrated its efforts on promoting awareness of library services and resources among undergraduates, and has already produced a second edition of its successful "Student Library Guide", first issued in the fall of 2003.[1] The Undergraduate Market Council mounted a popular display of gothic and horror titles for Halloween last fall (the titles were displayed in the library's new book rotunda, and many of them were circulated). The Council plans to expand its promotional efforts this year to feature works and authors that have won literary awards, such as the Nobel, Pulitzer and Booker prizes.

MARKET COUNCILS: FUTURE DIRECTIONS

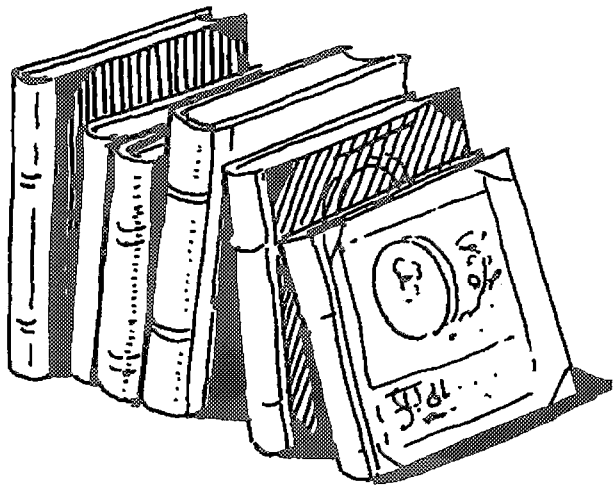
Over time, each council has developed its own agenda and personality. After nearly two years of activity, the market councils face a variety of challenges and opportunities for the market councils:

Scope of activities within and across the councils—Each council can choose to engage a range of issues in collection management, teaching and learning, scholarship and research, publicity and marketing, and internal library management and administration. Each council must assess the needs of its segment of the user community, and plan its activities in a way that effectively serves its constituents, and supports the mission of the library;

Formal program assessment and process improvement—The councils can provide a mechanism for the library to develop a formal program for assessing the overall effectiveness of its staff and resources, and for continuously improving its services and resources. The challenge will be to effectively engage existing staff in an ongoing and systematic effort to gather and compile data, conduct surveys and focus groups, and analyze and report results, by incorporating these tasks into their current portfolio of responsibilities;

Training for organizational effectiveness—The councils well positioned to play a role in the library's efforts to continuously refresh and retool staff skills, and orient new staff in the methods and techniques of effective communication and decision-making. Council membership offers new staff an introduction to the library's user-focused culture, and the character of the organization's efforts to shape its information resources and services in response to its dynamic campus environment.

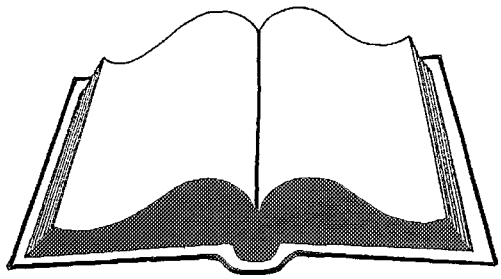
Membership and succession planning—Each council must continuously assess itself to ensure that it has the right mix of members to accomplish its current tasks, and to ensure that it can effectively deal with turnover and leadership succession. Under the current arrangement, each council has considerable freedom to manage its membership, including filling vacancies as they occur, and defining and filling the roles of convener, recorder and liaison to the Market Council Coordinating Group;



CONCLUSION

During restructuring, the market councils were built into the organization chart to provide lateral coordination across the library's functional teams and divisions, to formally address broad issues of user focus, and to enhance internal and external communication. After two years of missiondevelopment, agenda setting, and active engagement in a variety of issues and activities, the market councils have emerged as an effective means for ensuring that the library's information resources, internal processes and service initiatives are continually responsive to the changing needs of Emory's academic community.

[1] *Designing organizations: An executive briefing on strategy, structure and process.* Galbraith, Jay R. San Francisco, CA : Jossey Bass, c1995.
[2] "Students are users, too: A research library reaches out to the "undergraduate market" at Emory University". Elder, Jennifer Jones, Charles Forrest and Steve Thomas. *College and Research Libraries News*: accepted for publication, October 2004.



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Georgia College & State University Library and Information Technology Center

Designed by Cogdell & Mandrala of Savannah, and Hardy, Holzman, Pfeiffer Associates of New York, the 150,000 sq. ft. student-centered library facility includes shelving for 450,000 volumes, a museum with 3 galleries, a Special Collections area housing the Flannery O'Connor Collection, papers from Georgia's Senator Coverdell, 39 group study rooms, 2 electronic classrooms, 3 computer labs, a graphics lab, and the Books 'n Brew Internet cafe. A wide variety of spaces and seating are available for research, reflection, and conversation.

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